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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

TELEGRAM

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LE.O. 11652:
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SUBJECT:

ACTION:

FROM

AmEmbassy BUENOS AIRES

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GDS
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Gems from General ViolaSecState WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

BUENOS AIRES

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
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Exemption(s):
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1. At lunch with Ambassador June 8 Army Chief of Staff Maj.

Gen. Viola, accompanied by SecGen of Presidency Brig. Gen.

Villarreal, and SubSecs of Presidency Col. Mallea Gil and

Dr. Yofre, a number of subjects of mutual interest were

discussed in atmosphere of rather surprising frankness and

cordiality. Following important points from conversations:

IADB:

2. / In response to Ambassador Hill's question of what role

he saw for the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), Gen.
counteredViola/~~responded~~ with the question, "What does the US expect

of the IADB?" The General then went on to say that the US,

as the most powerful member of the group, must take the lead

in establishing the general course for the activities of the

IADB. He emphasized the importance of the IADB as a forum

and as a broadening educational experience for military

leaders and remarked that all of the members of the governing

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junta, and he himself, had served either at the IADB or its dependency, the Inter-American Defense College. He went on to remark that the IADB could be described as having been in a state of hibernation for a number of years, but concluded by strongly supporting the continuation of the Board as an Inter-American military institution which could be called upon on short notice to fulfill an important role in the security of the Americas.

3. Human Rights: Ambassador Hill noted favorable initial reception of new military government in U.S., and continuing good impression we have of efforts of GOA in economic recovery, etc. But problem of human rights abuses is beginning to cloud horizon, as illustrated by fact that U. S. Congress has begun to concern itself with Argentine performance in this area and linkage with military cooperation with Argentina is not unlikely if situation does not improve. Gen. Viola reacted well, accepting implied criticism in calm manner. He assured Ambassador that Pres. Videla has as much concern for situation as any U. S. congressman, is deeply and sincerely preoccupied with it, and feels it important to improve the situation not for effect it has upon GOA image abroad but for importance it has to Argentina domestically. If he could do so, Viola said, Videla would end problem with stroke of pen, but it is very difficult matter and one which will take time to solve. Interestingly,

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Viola did not try to disavow any GOA responsibility for abuses, and he did not play tune of necessity to subordinate human rights to suppression of terrorism, which is almost automatic response in many Argentine circles to expressions of concern over human rights. Viola stressed that Videla had to proceed slowly and with caution lest efforts to end human rights abuses lead to loss of institutional unity, which would in turn produce a very dangerous situation in Argentina.

4. Institutional Cohesion: General Viola, in response to implied question from one of the American guests as to whether Videla and moderates could control hardliners, replied with humor that "if we weren't sure we could control them, we would have joined them." He then called on SecGen of Presidency, Gen. Villarreal, to give more precise answer. Latter commented that question of differences between moderates and hardliners was much exaggerated. Basically, they are in agreement on most issues. He pointed out that even Gen. Menendez, the III Corps Commander, who is generally regarded as the hardest of the hardliners, had recently made statement emphasizing need for moderation and democracy in Argentina. Argentine politicians who stress differences between Videla and hardliners may be wittingly or unwittingly exacerbating situation by constantly harping on differences. (Note: His idea seemed to be that if one referred to splits

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often enough they might indeed begin to appear.)

5. Gen. Viola concluded comments on question of differences in Armed Forces by saying he ~~was~~ very surprised to hear that Gen. Villarreal was considered a moderate. He himself knew latter as hardnosed airborne commander and was certain troops under him would not consider him a moderate.

6. Comment: Ambassador and Emboffs were impressed by Viola and his colleagues. They are Videla's men, and they lost no opportunity to praise him. But they appear to be objective, sophisticated, friendly, and able to discuss very delicate points calmly and intelligently. Unlike some of the hardliners, they also appear to be basically friendly to the US. Their approach to human rights was encouraging. There was no effort on their part to shirk responsibility ^{or} to claim no problem exists; on contrary, everything Viola said on subject implied that problem does indeed exist, ~~and~~ that Videla is cognizant of it and will come to grips with it. Only thing Viola asked of US was understanding that this is very complex problem and a little more patience.

7. It was in the institutional interests of the Argentine military guests to downplay the differences between hard and softliners. Both sides try to maintain image of unity and cohesion. Villarreal's statement that differences have been greatly exaggerated was therefore to be expected. We suspect, however, that differences, and serious ones, ~~obviously~~ do exist.

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